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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000548

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2019
TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: NEW MOD SEEKS TO CONTINUE MILITARY COOPERATION
WITH THE U.S.

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert Blau; Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[¶1.](#) (U) Summary: On June 11, Charge, MILGROUP, and Defense Attache (DAO) met with the newly-appointed Minister of Defense (MOD), Colonel (retired) David Munguia Payes, and the new Salvadoran High Command. The newly-appointed Minister, who was not previously associated with the ruling left-wing FMLN, expressed interest in continuing close military cooperation with the U.S. Embassy representatives used the occasion to announce the USNS Comfort visit. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) The MOD began the meeting by expressing his appreciation for previous U.S. military assistance. He stated that he hoped that the Salvadoran armed forces (ESAF) and the USG would continue to cooperate in the future. Munguia Payes then introduced each member of the new High Command. The Charge emphasized the USG's desire to continue building upon the historically strong relationship between El Salvador and the U.S., as evidenced by the upcoming visit of the USNS Comfort and associated humanitarian/medical assistance projects.

[¶3.](#) (U) DAO and MILGROUP then provided an overview of U.S. military cooperation available to El Salvador, to include training, assistance, high-level visits, and institution building. Towards the conclusion of the meeting, Minister of Health Maria Isabel Rodriguez (a member of the ruling FMLN) joined the group for a more in-depth presentation on the forthcoming visit of the USNS Comfort. The briefing was followed by a press conference in which the Charge read a statement formally announcing the Comfort visit. The MOD and the Minister of Health praised U.S. humanitarian assistance to El Salvador during the press conference.

[¶4.](#) (C) Comment: This friendly exchange was a welcome first contact with both the Defense and Health Ministers since their June 1 appointments. Mungia Payes and company will likely prove bureaucratically weaker than their ARENA-appointed predecessors, but are by all appearances favorably disposed towards the U.S. Public praise of the pending arrival of the USNS Comfort from the newly-appointed MOD and the Minister of Health highlights the potential benefits of continued cooperation with the U.S. military. End comment.
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